

# First Words

## *A First Steps Communications Tool for Families From Family to Family*

“...As with all First Steps services, families make the choice of which mental health provider they want on their child’s team.”

### Alphabet Soup

Each month we will cover a few abbreviations or acronyms parents might hear while in First Steps. Sometimes it is awkward for families to ask. Do you know these?

- **ADL = Activities of Daily Living**

Age-appropriate activities children do on a daily basis, including sleeping, eating, dressing, playing, and moving around their world.

- **Dx = Diagnosis**

A label assigned by a doctor or therapist to a medical or developmental condition

- **Tx = Treatment**

A recommended method for intervening in a medical or developmental condition

Infant Mental Health article adapted from :

[Mental Health Assessment, Indiana Association for Infant and Toddler Mental Health, Mental Health Task Force, April, 2004](#)

## Infant Mental Health – What is an Assessment and Who Can Help My Child?

In the last issue, some general information and some “red flag” behaviors were given with regard to an infant or toddler’s mental health. In this issue, the process of evaluation and assessment will be presented, along with some information about the types of professionals who provide mental health services in First Steps.

What if you have concerns about your child’s emotional development? What if another First Steps provider mentions some of your child’s behaviors that concern him/her? What if your child’s medical diagnosis lends itself to issues with self-regulation (i.e. calming, sleeping, feeding) or behavior issues? Help is available to families with these concerns through First Steps. If you are newly referred, be sure to discuss your social-emotional concerns for your child with the intake coordinator. He/she will arrange for an appropriate evaluation to take place. If your child is already receiving services, talk with your service coordinator and again, he/she can arrange for evaluation activities.

What can you expect from an evaluation? One type of evaluation tool is a screening. A screening can be done by a trained professional (such as a developmental therapist) who may or may not be a mental health professional. A screening is most often accomplished by a parent/caregiver answering questions from a standardized assessment tool. A more thorough assessment may be done by a mental health professional which would include: a review of any existing information (previous reports, baby books, medical documents—anything that has developmental milestones/information, etc.), observation of the child in relationships (in their natural environment), interviews (with family members, caregivers and any other adults who have an important role in the child’s life) and standardized testing tools (which can be useful, but not always appropriate for every child). Once an evaluation is completed, the mental health provider will write a report describing a child’s needs and competencies along with suggestions for resources, services and supports that may help the child and family. Based on this report, your child’s team may agree that a mental health provider would be an appropriate service for your child through First Steps. You would then select a provider through the matrix, just like any other First Steps provider on your team.

What types of professionals provide mental health services through First Steps? Providers currently listed in the First Steps matrix include social workers, Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT) and psychologists. Some providers may have more than one licensure. Social Workers have a master’s degree (along with clinical skill experience) and can provide assessment, counseling and many other supportive services. An LMHC or an LMFT also has a master’s or doctoral degree (along with clinical training). They are able to perform assessments and are trained in counseling methods. Psychologists with the designation HSPP have earned a

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## Including Siblings In Your Child's Therapy

Siblings often have special bonds. Why not capitalize on these special relationships to help your child in First Steps achieve his/her IFSP outcomes? Children who have a sibling with a disability or special need can be affected in a number of ways, some positive, some negative. First Steps is about helping families address their needs, not just the needs of their child receiving services. If you have other children in the household who are naturally curious about therapy activities, ask your service providers how they might be included.

A "typical" sibling can be a huge motivator for a child with special needs, and the

sibling(s) can model positions, help hold things, provide encouragement, help with turn taking and many other developmentally appropriate activities. All service providers are different, but they will likely find some way for siblings to take part if you request it. Some activities lend themselves to sibling involvement, while others do not. Let your therapists provide direction. After all, including siblings only enhances the idea of natural environments and if done in an effective way, it will make brothers and sisters feel they have an important job in the family.

## What is an Assessment and Who Can Help My Child?

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doctorate and completed an internship. They are able to provide consultation to other professionals, psychotherapy and assessment, as well as make diagnoses. School psychologists may have a master's or doctoral degree with an endorsement obtained through additional clinical supervision. They can provide consultation, intervention, assessments and diagnose concerns that appear in the special education law.

As with all First Steps services, families choose which mental health provider they want on their child's team. Mental health providers come from many backgrounds and have different levels of experience. The provider's specific degree is often less important to families than the provider's experience with young children. Families are encouraged to interview prospective providers to help ensure a good match.

### Advocacy Tip of the Month

***The birth of a child with special needs has a profound impact on the entire family. Each family copes with this life change differently, but many families have found the following to be helpful:***

- ***collecting information about the disability and how they can best help their child***
- ***joining parent support groups***
- ***reading books published by and for parents of children with special needs***
- ***accessing local and state services for which they are eligible***

***If you want to pursue these suggestions but do not know where to start, contact Family to Family, and we will help you get going in the right direction!***

## Resources for Families and Providers

**Check out these resources on siblings:**

**The Sibling Support Project**

<http://www.thearc.org/siblingsupport/>

**Siblings of Kids with Special Needs**

<http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/specneed.htm>

**The Power of Siblings**

<http://specialchildren.about.com/library/weekly/aa012903a.htm>

**Family Village Library**

[http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/general/frc\\_sibl.htm](http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/general/frc_sibl.htm)

For more information about Family to Family, visit our web page at [http://www.in.gov/fssa/first\\_step/f2f/index.html](http://www.in.gov/fssa/first_step/f2f/index.html) or contact Mary Jo Paladino at 574-273-6019 or [mpaladin@indiana.edu](mailto:mpaladin@indiana.edu)